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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 001363

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SUBJECT: (C) OTTE SAYS HE'S PRESSING PA FOR SECURITY REFORM, BUT UNDERSTANDS "LIMITATIONS" ON PA'S CAPABILITY

FOR SECURITY ACTION

Classified By: Ambassador Daniel C. Kurtzer for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

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Summary  
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11. (C) In a March 7 meeting with the Ambassador, EU Middle East envoy Marc Otte said he would press the PA, during his visit this week, on the need for security service reform, while focusing in his GOI meetings on Israeli-Palestinian economic cooperation. He reported that World Bank President Wolfensohn had told him that the Bank would not ask for donor support for Palestinian economic infrastructure absent Israeli security "openings." Noting that Abu Mazen told EU officials in Brussels following the recent Tel Aviv bombing that the PA is not capable of responding in areas it does not control, Otte said expectations for PA performance should be tempered by realism about PA capabilities. The Ambassador pressed back, pointing out that the PA could find many ways to assist an investigation, such as the one into the Tel Aviv bombing, even without full security control in relevant areas.

12. (C) Otte confirmed reports that the EU is debating how to deal with Hamas in the run-up to Palestinian Legislative Council elections, although he said that chances for removing Hamas from the EU terrorist list are slim given the EU requirement for consensus. Otte saw chances for the EU listing Hizballah as similarly slim, despite Hizballah's recent pro-Syrian posture, because "even the Brits" want to defer a decision until after the Lebanese elections. Noting that the Syria-Lebanon turmoil was a major topic of discussion during his just-completed visit to Cairo, Otte assessed that Egyptian officials are pressing President Assad hard, and that they appear well-informed about Assad's intentions. GOE intelligence chief Soleiman expressed concern about the Syria-Lebanon situation, commenting that "the Syrians don't get it." Recalling his meeting with Assad a week before the Hariri assassination, Otte commented that Assad seemed to view high-level visits to Damascus not as signs of international displeasure with the SARG, but as reaffirmation of his own importance. END SUMMARY.

13. (C) Amb. Marc Otte, the EU Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process, told the Ambassador March 7 that he would focus, during his visit this week, on security reform in his meetings with PA officials, and on Israeli-Palestinian economic cooperation in his meetings with the GOI. He noted that the EU has accelerated its assistance to the PA security services, but that he would make clear to his PA interlocutors that EU material assistance must fit into a larger PA plan to "transform" the services. He gave few details of the economic issues he would raise with the GOI, but noted that World Bank President Wolfensohn recently told him that the Bank would not/not ask donors to contribute to economic infrastructure projects for the Palestinians absent security "openings" by the Israelis to facilitate the movement of people and goods.

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PA Security Reform  
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14. (C) Otte reported that he had stressed the need for the PA security services to act against terrorism when he met, during a just-completed trip to Egypt, with Egyptian intelligence chief Omar Soleiman. He said he urged Soleiman to step up GOE assistance to the PA security services. The Ambassador commented in response that our current message to Soleiman stresses the need for Egypt to work with PA security force leaders to help mold their organizational planning. Material assistance is secondary.

15. (C) Reflecting on the PA security response to the February 25 suicide bombing in Tel Aviv, Otte noted that Abu Mazen had told EU officials in Brussels after the bombing that PA security forces could not be expected to pursue suspects in areas under Israeli security control. Otte commented that the international community should give weight to PA security capabilities in formulating expectations for PA security performance. The Ambassador concurred that the PA security services have weaknesses, but pointed to ways that the PA

could use resources it does have to assist investigations such as the one into the Tel Aviv bombing. The GOI, he noted, shares responsibility with the PA for the difficulty the two sides have had collaborating in the Tel Aviv bombing investigation. The U.S. has been trying to coax the two sides to overcome inhibitions, such as about protocol, to cooperate more effectively in the bombing investigation and broader joint security projects, especially the transfer of authority in West Bank cities.

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EU Debate on Hamas...  
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16. (C) The Ambassador asked Otte about reports that France and Italy are advancing a proposal to remove Hamas from the EU list of terrorist organizations. Otte acknowledged that EU states are debating how to deal with Hamas during the upcoming Palestinian Legislative Council elections. Chances that the EU would delist Hamas are small, he said, because the step would require EU unanimity. At the same time, he added, "nothing prevents" EU states from taking national measures on Hamas. He noted, for example, that the lack of EU action on adding Hizballah to the list of terrorist organizations has not prevented the Netherlands from categorizing Hizballah as a terrorist organization on its national list. (Comment: The comparison was unclear. Otte did not explain how individual EU states could take steps to interact with Hamas in ways precluded by Hamas' designation on the EU terrorist list.)

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... and on Hizballah  
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17. (C) The Ambassador asked for Otte's assessment of chances that the EU would decide to place Hizballah on the terrorist list, especially in light of Hizballah's recent pro-Syrian stance. Otte said the Hizballah designation is still a matter of debate within the EU. "Even the Brits," he said, are "cautious" about the designation, preferring to wait until after the Lebanese elections so that they can assess Hizballah's role in domestic Lebanese political life.

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Syria-Lebanon  
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18. (C) Otte reported that ongoing events between Syria and Lebanon were a major theme in his discussions in Cairo. The GOE, he commented, is clearly lobbying President Assad hard and is aware of Assad's thinking. Egyptian FM Aboul Gheit, for example, gave Otte the gist of Assad's speech on Syrian troop redeployments in Lebanon a half-hour before Assad spoke. Soleiman, he noted, expressed concern about the direction of the Syria-Lebanon issue, telling Otte that "the Syrians don't get it."

19. (C) Otte recounted that he had met with Assad about a week before the Hariri assassination. Assad then tried to convince Otte of his good intentions toward Lebanon and Israel, and complained about what he perceived as President Chirac's obsession about ending the Syrian presence in Lebanon. Otte said he told Assad that the EU was not seeking to isolate Syria, but that Syria had few friends and needed to improve its posture toward Israel, Lebanon and Iraq. Otte said he warned Assad not to spoil the positive momentum in the Israeli-Palestinian track following the Sharm al-Sheikh summit. The Ambassador asked Otte to assess whether Assad appreciates the seriousness of messages he receives from high-level visitors to Damascus, or whether Assad perceives the visits as signs of his importance in the region. Otte said that Assad appeared to have interpreted then-Deputy Secretary Armitage's January visit as a sign of encouragement

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because it occurred despite what Assad perceived as likely objections to the visit by USG hard-liners seeking to isolate Syria.

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